astronomy. The telescope will have effective aperture of about 8—10 metres. A binocular telescope similar to Large Binocular Telescope, Mt. Hopkins, USA, is one design being looked into. Further details are being worked out. The Hanle site was identified during 1992—95 for the large telescope. It proved to be the best astronomical site in India and one of the best sites in the world. In 1997, the Government approved the 2-m Himalayan Chandra Telescope Project as a first step to prepare this remote high altitude site for the large telescope. The details on the preliminary design of the large telescope, the budgetary requirements of the project, and implementation strategy are being worked out. The proposal has been included in the Annual Plan 2002-2003 and Tenth Five Year Plan document of this Department for consideration and approval by Planning Commission.

Value addition to Maize

*131. SHRI K.B. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have under-rated Maize cultivation, in comparison to wheat and paddy;

(b) whether maize is being perceived as fit for cattle/poultry feed only; if so, whether Government would explore the possibilities of value addition to maize, to make it fit for human consumption;

(c) whether India has presently 6.3 mt/hectares of land under maize cultivation, yielding an annual crop of 11.5 mt. tonnes, with an yield of only 1.76 tonnes/hectare, as compared to 8.4 tonnes/hectare in US and Mexico; and

(d) if so, whether Government would propagate cultivation of hybrid/genetically modified varieties of Maize?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) No, Sir, Maize crop has been imparted the appropriate thrust by Government of India, both in terms of research and development under National Agricultural System by elevating the "Coordinated Research Project" to the directorate of Maize Research (DMR) and implementing an independent centrally sponsored scheme entitled "Accelerated Maize Development Programme (AMDP)" in which a

multi-pronged approach with emphasis on research and development, post harvest technology, supply of inputs and transfer of technology, etc., has been adopted.

(b) No, Sir. Maize is primarily used for human consumption. It is estimated that 45-48% of maize produced in the country is used as food.

Maize has over 3500 uses. Many value-added products are being derived from maize *viz.* various types of Starches, Glucose, High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS), Sorbitol, Corn Oil, Dextrose, Corn Sugar & Lactic acid etc.

Under the ICAR Research system, a new variety, *viz.* Quality Protein Maize (QPM) with better protein quality and a higher yield potential than normal maize hybrids has been developed and released for commercial cultivation. In addition to QPM, other varieties like sweet corn, pop corn, baby corn have also been developed.

(c) During 2000-2001, maize crop was grown over an area of 6.56 million hectares with a production of 12.07 million tonnes and a productivity level of 1.84 tonnes/hectare.

It is a fact that our average yield levels are much lower as compared to those in US and Mexico. However, this is because the crop in those two countries is grown under temperate conditions over large lands whereas majority of our crop is grown as a kharif crop in small and marginal lands, by resource poor small & marginal farmers and highly dependent upon the vagaries of monsoons. Further, kharif crop also encounters several biotic and abiotic factors. However, our winter crop's (Rabi Maize), where the crop is grown under temperate condition, productivity level under ideal conditions, is comparable to those in US and Mexico. Similarly, our kharif maize yield also compares well with those of other tropical countries.

(d) To harness maximum yield advantage, the emphasis has been laid on the development of nutritionally superior high yielding hybrids, specially single cross hybrids by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)/Directorate of Maize Research (DMR). Efforts are being made for gradually shifting area under the

composites/local varieties to hybrids with emphasis on two parent hybrids in early maturing materials and single cross hybrids in case of full and medium maturity materials.

Genetically, modified varieties of maize are at present being tested under controlled conditions.

Retrenchment of employees in SAIL

†*132. SHRI KAPIL SIBAL:
SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:

Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Steel Authority of India Limited, has considered the new proposal of reducing the number of employees, to do away with the expenses;

(b) if so, whether a decision is being taken to relieve 16,000 employees by March, 2003;

(c) if so, the details in this regard; and

(d) which posts and the number of persons holding the same, who are to be relieved?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI BRAJ KISHORE TRIPATHY): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Manpower in Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) is proposed to be brought down to around 1 lakh by the end of the financial year 2004-05. Accordingly, during the financial year 2002-2003, SAIL proposes to reduce its manpower by about 16,000. This is proposed to be done through introduction of Voluntary Retirement Scheme, natural and other separations and minimal recruitment.

(d) The Voluntary Retirement Scheme is beign operated in all units and departments of SAIL, excluding some critical categories, and accordingly no specific posts have been identified for VR.

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†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.